

U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., Commentary, *Star Tribune*

Republicans want to strip it of funding in their cutting extravaganza. That's dumb.

Congressional Republicans assert that their federal budget-cutting, regardless how destructive, reflects the desires of the American people.

The cuts passed last week by House Republicans trim the remainder of the fiscal 2011 budget. They eliminate \$75 million for homeless veterans; completely wipe out funding for women's health and family planning (\$317 million); slash funding for Head Start; reduce Pell Grants that help low-income students go to college -- and the list continues.

The sum of the Republican cuts would reduce this year's federal budget deficit by about 4 percent, while, according to the Economic Policy Institute, costing 800,000 American jobs in the public, nonprofit and private sectors.

Pursuing a strategy that weakens communities, kills jobs and makes our most vulnerable citizens bear the burden for tax cuts for the wealthiest citizens would not be complete if Americans could continue to access quality public broadcasting that informs and educates.

So it should not be surprising that my Republican colleagues want to eliminate federal support for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

Last week, despite the unanimous opposition of Democrats, the U.S. House passed an appropriations bill that eliminates all funding for CPB and ends federal support for public media.

If allowed to stand, this attack on unbiased reporting and quality cultural and educational programming on television and radio and online will have dire consequences here at home for Minnesota Public Radio and Twin Cities Public Television, not to mention the Minnesotans who rely on public broadcasting every day.

Federal funding to CPB is directed to local public broadcasting stations, which provide

commercial-free, high-quality programming to millions of Americans every day.

Outlets make their broadcasts available to all of us, but also provide underserved audiences, children, minorities and low-income Americans with nonbiased news and cultural programming.

This national public media investment reaches nearly 99 percent of Americans, all at a cost of about \$1.35 per person per year.

According to a Roper Public Opinion Poll, Americans rated public broadcasting as an "excellent" use of taxpayer dollars -- second among federal agencies.

Eighty percent of those surveyed believe that funding for public broadcasting is money "well spent."

Public broadcasting is a popular and effective public asset that citizens of all ages strongly support. I support public broadcasting.

During the budget debate, my office was overwhelmed with calls and e-mails from other Minnesotans who passionately support it.

Unfortunately, my Republican colleagues don't support public broadcasting. They are more focused on ideological budget-cutting regardless of a program's effectiveness or how much it benefits the public.

We all have to stand together -- all 170 million Americans who every month access noncommercial programming supported by CPB. We need to fight for public broadcasting, and we simply cannot take it for granted.

During this time of tough budget choices and tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, Congress must decide to make "smart cuts" or "dumb cuts."

Federal support for CPB keeps our citizens informed, educates our children and makes our communities stronger, all of which add up to a smarter America.

The work of Minnesota Public Radio and Twin Cities Public Television as media outlets and employers in my congressional district reflect the very best in a public-private partnership.

Eliminating federal support for public broadcasting does not make America smarter, stronger or better, so let's call it what it is: a "dumb cut" that the American people can't afford.

Betty McCollum, a Democrat, represents Minnesota's Fourth Congressional District in the U.S. House.